

The MIND Reader

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Why Spouses Hurt You More Than Anyone Else

By: Mark Russell

I'm sure many people reading that title are coming up with all sorts of reasons that it's not true. I would say that if it's not true, then you actually might be in *more* trouble. Hurt generally comes from a place of vulnerability. More often than not, we are not hurt if we do not care about something. When that care is damaged, questioned, or disregarded, we usually feel hurt. Ideally, couples care very much for one another. Some would argue that the healthiest marriages are those where the spouses put each other before anyone else.

What allows a couple to have that level of care for one another? Vulnerability and intimacy. Marriage creates perhaps the most vulnerable context that a human can encounter. You are fully exposed both literally and figuratively when you are with your spouse. No one else should have that kind of access to you. There is still a part of you that is uniquely individual, but even that is at very least seen by your spouse. Our relationships with family, friends, and coworkers generally does not – and in my opinion should not – involve that level of closeness.

Unfortunately, because spouses have so much access to one another, they can also impact you more significantly when you are hurt. When a random stranger bumps into you and says something rude, I doubt you like it, but you are most likely over it a moment later. When your spouse disregards your feelings when you are trying to express something sincerely, I suspect that the hurt feelings associated with that linger a bit longer and probably led to an argument.

Conflict in a relationship is natural. As I said before, we all maintain our unique individuality even in marriage. That individuality will likely not agree with your spouse's individuality at some point. Tada! Conflict. Accepting that conflict is a part of the process and choosing to engage your spouse rather than withdraw is a crucial part of maintaining a healthy relationship. This is not to say that taking a short break to calm down before talking about an issue is a bad idea. I strongly encourage "time outs" to prevent conflict from escalating unnecessarily.

What I mean by **engaging** is choosing to believe that your spouse is not intending to hurt you, and in the event that they do, there is a good chance that it was an accident or that they are hurting too. Take a moment to honestly express your upset feeling. Anger will likely be present, but try to find the more vulnerable feeling that is hiding beneath that anger. Some of the usual suspects include: insecurity, loneliness, rejection, incompetence, fear, and insignificance. (Continued on Page 3)

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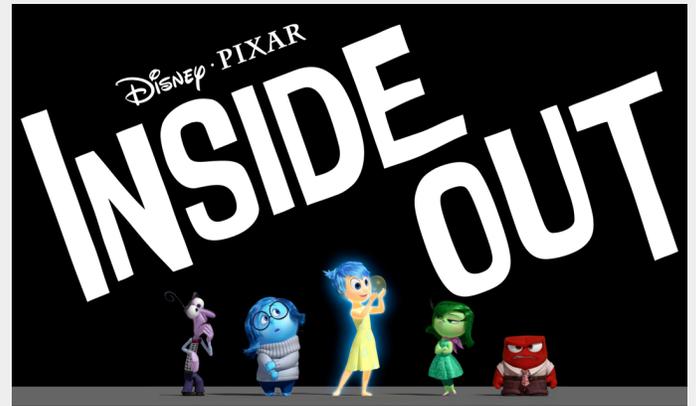
- ◆ Why Spouses Hurt You More Than Anyone Else
- ◆ Inside Out: A Reminder of What Was and What Is.
- ◆ Meet The Parents—Pure Joy
- ◆ Name It To Tame It

Positive Parenting

Mind Spa will be offering another parenting workshop on July 11th from 9:00-12:00 at First Baptist Church. Please call our office for more information and to register. Refreshments and childcare will be provided. Space is limited, Call today!

There is a reality that I tell my clients and my clients' parents on a regular basis: Parents are dumb. Parents, in their quest to find the harmonious balance between chaos and peace have forgotten key pieces of what it was like to be a child along the way. They have forgotten what it was like to have intense emotions, to not understand the world around them, to what it was like to do nothing but just "form": everyday forming into the person that one day you will be. They have forgotten how exhausting that formation is on oneself.

I have spent lots of time looking for resources to help remind forgetful adults what it was like during those formative years, and nothing comes close to cultivating that experience more accurately than Pixar's new motion picture Inside Out. The movie takes place in the conscious mind of Riley, an 11 year old girl who just moved to San Francisco from the mid west. In her conscious mind lives Joy, Sadness, Fear, Disgust, and Anger. They control Riley's mental motherboard with appropriate responses. Joy, insisting that Riley is always happy, accidentally sets off a chain of events where Joy and Sadness get lost from the motherboard leaving Fear, Disgust and Anger with the controls.



This movie does a beautiful job displaying key aspects of a child's emotional development. The first key aspect is the emotional changes happening in Riley over time. We see the motherboard that the emotions interact with becomes bigger and more complex. We see that when Joy and Sadness vanish, Riley tries using Fear, Disgust, and Anger to recreate that joy with those attempts leading to outbursts and unwanted behaviors. We see how Riley's imagination and memories change in order to help her to adjust to the stress of a move. We watch as the five emotions learn that emotions are complicated, and now it's okay for Riley to figure blended or mixed emotions.

Finally, this movie emphasizes that childhood can be completely lonely. There is no enemy for Riley or her emotions to fight. There is no bully or adversary causing the issues. The fight in the movie is within Riley and Riley is fighting it alone. Here is the portion of childhood that is often forgotten: how incredibly lonely and isolating it can be. Not because there is no one there to care, but because children don't know what they are doing or how to let someone know that exact fact. They feel the need to do it on their own, even if it is painful.

I cannot recommend this movie enough to anyone who is a human being. Not only will you learn something incredibly valuable about how children emotionally develop and function, but there is a great chance you will learn something about yourself. If you are a parent I invite you to see this movie with your child. It could open up a great conversation, and a chance to understand your child more deeply.

Meet the Parents—Pure Joy

By: Brandon Dixon

"Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing...develops perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." This is one of the most challenging quotations I've ever encountered just as parenting can be one of the most challenging "trials" we will ever face. Yet, "consider it pure joy!" Really? Really!

Perseverance is a trademark of love, unconditional, accepting, enduring, relentless love. It is love that we depend upon for the routines and trials of life whether it be our own development as parents or the maturation of our children or how these intermingle. Without it there is not much left, if anything, that is meaningful to our core. (Continued on page 5)

A month ago my husband, our almost three-year-old son and I were driving on the highway when suddenly a truck began to merge into our lane. Apparently we were in the trucks blind spot and it only noticed us when it was about to hit us. Obviously this elicited a lot of strong emotions in my husband and I that we expressed in some rather “excited” ways. We were scared and upset and our son witnessed this. Although he could not fully understand why mom and dad were scared and upset, he knew that something really bad almost happened related to the truck. He began to talk about his experience. He said, “The truck almost hit us.” I would reply, “Yes the truck started to come into our lane, and it was scary and mom and dad got scared and that scared you, but we are all safe and okay.” Over and over again, he repeated what happened and I continued to tell him the story of what happened, what emotions it brought out in all of us, and that in the end we were all safe and okay. Eventually he moved on to a new topic and reported, “I’m all better.” This story illustrates a concept which Daniel Siegel, child psychiatrist and author, talks about in his book “The Whole Brain Child.” He refers to this concept as “Name it to Tame it.”

Siegel says, “When a child experiences painful, disappointing, or scary moments, it can be overwhelming, with big emotions and bodily sensations flooding the right brain. When this happens, we as parents can help bring the left hemisphere into the picture so that the child can begin to understand what’s happening. One of the best ways to promote this type of integration is to help retell the story of the frightening or painful experience.”

Our son was able to work through this scary experience by having it explained to him, with kindness and empathy, and being assured that he (and his parents) were okay. He needed to “retell his story” until his brain could calm down. The idea is that when children understand what has happened to them they are able to more quickly move on. To read more about what is actually happening in the brain and why naming it “calms” the brain down, I recommend reading Daniel Siegel and Tina Bryson’s book, “The Whole Brain Child.”

I have seen this concept work beautifully with our son in relation to falling and skinning his knee, difficult bedtime transitions, and dealing with friends who don’t want to play with him when he wants to play. For instance, when he falls and hurts himself and I say, “You were running really fast and tripped over a crack in the sidewalk and fell down. Now your knee is bleeding and you are feeling sad and hurt” he is able to “see” why he hurts and name the emotion attached. Oftentimes after snuggles, band aids, and repeating the story until his brain “gets it” he will report, “I’m all better” and re-engage in play.

This concept is a powerful tool for us to use as parents (and for us to use for ourselves!). I recommend you use this tool next time your child experiences distress of any form and see how the naming and explaining can bring him or her more quickly into a calm and regulated state.

Why Spouses Hurt You More Than Anyone Else (Continued)

When you present the feeling, try to use statements focusing on yourself rather than attacking the other person’s actions. “I felt rejected when we were talking earlier.” “I was afraid you didn’t love me anymore.” “I felt so alone when you forgot our anniversary.”

The goal of these types of statements is to create intimacy. Yes, you are highlighting something that went wrong, but you are doing so in a way that invites closeness rather than creating distance. Now if you are on the receiving end of one of these statements, check your own defensiveness. You were not just attacked. Your spouse let you see their hurt. Respond to that invitation with your own closeness. Begin by validating the feeling that they experienced before you try to clarify your intentions. “I’m sorry that you felt rejected. I had a terrible day at work, and I took it out on you. Will you forgive me?” This highlights a few important details. First, you do not want your spouse to feel the negative feeling, but you do not deny them the feeling. Second, you acknowledge your contribution to the feeling even if you are not 100% responsible. Finally, you ask forgiveness for the contribution.

The old phrase “it takes two to tango” exists for a reason. When you and your spouse argue, take a second to think about how you have contributed to the situation. Taking ownership and responsibility for yourself (and hopefully your spouse doing the same) will generally reduce the severity of an argument almost immediately. Choosing to forgive each other for those contributions creates intimacy. You may hurt each other more than anyone else, but only because you love each other more than anyone else.

Mind Spa

Your Mental Health Home

We offer a unique mix of mental health professionals who have a broad variety of experience and expertise designed to meet your needs.

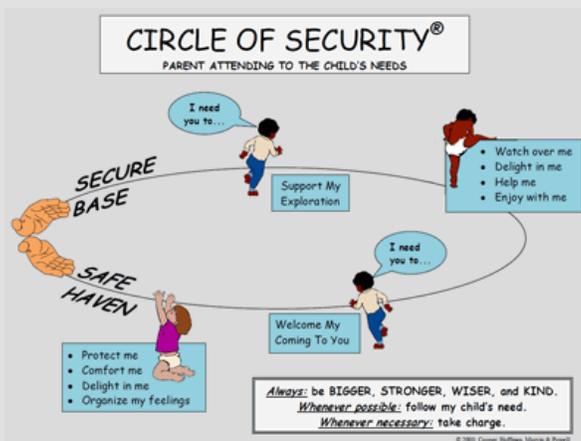
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Meet the Parents—Pure Joy (Continued)

Here I offer a brief discussion touching on the expectations we have for our children, of ourselves, and parenting itself and how realistic or idealistic these expectations may be. No matter what our expectations are there are always exceptions, because we are all unique individuals and continue to develop and mature in similar yet various ways with differing time tables. Because maturation doesn't always *seem* to occur in a "logical" order or sometimes at all, this is why we trust in our ability to love and persevere through the process of our children's learning and our gaining a better understanding of it.

There are many biological, social, and psychological aspects (some theoretical, many scientific) that influence how children develop, what, when, and why they learn and do. As a parent, learning about and paying attention to these factors will help you develop healthy expectations for you and your child as you grow together in your relationship and in the world. The emphasis on and addressing of particular expectations will change over time, let me emphasize- *over time (perseverance)*, as they are fulfilled, with training and encouragement (like learning to use the toilet). Once your child has learned this they are expected to continue meeting this expectation. Of course, in this task, as in many others, there will be mistakes and accidents, some inconsistencies, until the learning is "complete" or our bladders weaken in old age or due to other biological factors.



So we see that learning, being a child, being a parent is a process. We've considered what parents can expect, but what about the child, what can your child expect from you in order to allow this learning process to occur? The Circle of Security, developed by Cooper, Hoffman, Powell, & Marvin, is a model of intervention and understanding based on over fifty years of early childhood attachment research. Unlike being part of the "circle of trust" from the movie *Meet the Parents*, in which you are either in or out of, the Circle of Security provides a Secure Base and Safe Haven to the child from the parent. It is not performance based, yet experiential. It is from that secure base that a child is supported in their exploration of the world. In this exploration a child needs for the parent to

watch over them, delight in them, help them, and enjoy with them. Then it is the Safe Haven, unconditional love, that a parent must provide for the child to return to, welcoming the child with open arms. In this safe haven a child needs their parent to comfort them, protect them, delight in them and organize and make sense of their feelings with or for them. As a child may not know what to do with the feelings they have experienced, they rely on the parent to be stronger, kinder, and wiser to help them do this.

There is so much to take into consideration, isn't there. So, consider it pure joy! Love accomplishes this and covers a multitude in the face of trials of many kinds. Love is the constant in how we approach and adapt to the developmental processes of our children's growth, our parenting. Inconsistency, to show love, on a parent's part deteriorates the attachment and trust a child needs to be open to learn. A lack of trust toward a parent can influence a child's need to seek out some comfort for themselves. They may do this by asserting control in their world which can look and feel like demands or defiance, since they may not feel comfortable cooperating otherwise. On the other hand, at some level, a child's apparent defiance may just be their development of a stronger sense of self within secure relationships. So what do we learn?

Of course there is grace - we need to pay attention and attend to what is occurring and why and check it with how we are interacting with our children. It is our interactions that teach them what, or rather, who is important. So how can we be complete, lacking in nothing, how do we pass the test(s)? The testing is the training itself and we do it together, with love, because love never fails, it always perseveres.

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